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HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
NEW YORK

Harps Hung Up in Babylon

BY
ARTHUR COLTON



NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1907

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ARTHUR COLTON

THE QUINN & BODEN CO. PRESS
RAHWAY, N. J.

DEDICATED TO
MY FATHER

176290

The harps hung up in Babylon,
Their loosened strings rang on, sang on,
And cast their murmurs forth upon
The roll and roar of Babylon:
*"Forget me, Lord, if I forget
Jerusalem for Babylon,
If I forget the vision set
High as the head of Lebanon
Is lifted over Syria yet,
If I forget and bow me down
To brutish gods of Babylon."*

Two rivers to each other run
In the very midst of Babylon,
And swifter than their current fleets
The restless river of the streets
Of Babylon, of Babylon,
And Babylon's towers smite the sky,
But higher reeks to God most high
The smoke of her iniquity:
*"But oh, betwixt the green and blue
To walk the hills that once we knew
When you were pure and I was true,"—*
So rang the harps in Babylon—
*"Or ere along the roads of stone
Had led us captive one by one
The subtle gods of Babylon."*

The harps hung up in Babylon
Hung silent till the prophet dawn,
When Judah's feet the highway burned
Back to the holy hills returned,
And shook their dust on Babylon.
In Zion's halls the wild harps rang,
To Zion's walls their smitten clang,
And lo! of Babylon they sang,
They only sang of Babylon:
*"Jehovah, round whose throne of awe
The vassal stars their orbits draw
Within the circle of Thy law,
Can'st Thou make nothing what is done,
Or cause Thy servant to be one
That has not been in Babylon,
That has not known the power and pain
Of life poured out like driven rain?
I will go down and find again
My soul that's lost in Babylon."*

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WEST-EASTERLY MORALITIES



THE CAPTIVE

There was a king, returned from putting down
The stiff rebellion of an Afghan town,
Who marked for death a captive. Then arose
The ragged Afghan from the marble floor,
Nor longer to the king's feet weeping clung,
But in the babble of his foreign tongue
He cursed him, as that ancient saying goes:
"Who comes to wash himself in death, before
Entering the pool, empties his heart ashore."

"What mean these words?" The king's voice, cold
and loud,
Rang in the space above the frightened crowd,
That bent before it, as when storm-winds blow
Their warning horns, and the storm crouches low
Still on the solid hills with sombre eyes,
Long lightnings slant, and muffled thunders rise,
And startled forests, helpless to retreat,
Stand with their struggling arms and buried feet.

An aged vizier rose, and bowed his head,
Clasping his gentle withered hands: "He said:
'To two God gives the shelter of His cloak,
Him who keeps down the anger in his breast,
Him who in justice counteth mercy best;
God shelter me and thee.' The man so spoke."

And the king bade them set the Afghan free,
Who in the face of death spoke graciously.

Ben Ali, the young vizier, to his feet
Leaped: "As I hold by counsellors it is meet
Truth should be spoken at a king's demand,
This man reviled thee with a shameful word!"
Whereat the king was mute, as one who heard
A voice in his own breast; turned with his hand
The bracelets on his arm; then speaking low,
Once more he bade them let the Afghan go.

THE KING.

"Art thou so upright, and by God made free
To be malignant in integrity?
Is it the truth alone thou owest to the king?
Nay, but all oracles that whispering
Speak in the central chamber of the heart,
Saving when envy speaks, which spoke in thee.
But thou, my father, shall not thy name be
Henceforth 'The Merciful'? For so thou art.

So spoke the king, and, leaning head to head,
The courtiers whispered, and Ben Ali said:

BEN ALI.

"Is it not written: 'When the truth is known,
Then only the king's mercy is his own'?
If then the king his servant will forgive
For rendering back the king's prerogative,
Forgive the misshaped mouth ill made to lie,
Forgive the straitened walk, the single eye,
Forgive the holy dead for truth who died,
And those who thought their deaths were sanctified;
With such forgiveness let me then go hence,
And, in some desert place of penitence
And meditation, read it in the dust,
If He who sends His rain upon the just,
And sends His rain upon the unjust too,
Is mercifully false, or merely true."

THE KING.

And the king said: "Thou livest! And thy words
Are more for peril than a thousand swords!
Is it king's custom to bear two men's scorn
In the short compass of a single morn?
Go to thine house and wait until thou know
The king's hand follows when his voice says, Go."

Ben Ali from the court went forth in shame,
And after him the shivering Afghan came,
Whom, taking by the garment, he led down
Through the packed highways of the busy town,
To where in flowers and shadows, peace and pride,
His gardened palace by the river side
Lay like a lotus in perfumed repose ;
There set a feast for him as for the king,
With friendly words and courteous welcoming
Sat with the ragged Afghan, while beneath
The dancing girls, each with her jasmine wreath,—
And one that dallied with a crimson rose,—
Sang softly in the garden cool, that sank
By lawn and terrace to the river's bank :

“So dear thou art,
The seed that thou hast planted in the mould
And fertile fallow of my heart
Hath borne a thousand-fold,
So dear thou art.

“Sweet love, wild love,
Love will I sow and love will reap,
And where the golden harvest bends above
There will I find sleep,
Sweet love, child love.”

And when the feast was over, and remained
Only the fruits, and wine in flasks contained,
And costly drinking cups, Ben Ali rose
And left the chattering Afghan with a smile,
To walk among his aloe trees awhile,
Thinking: "Day closes. Ere another close
These things I see no more, for a king's wrath
Leaps foaming down and falls, as cataracts leap
And fall from sleeping pools to pools asleep,
And either ere to-morrow night I die,
Or all my days in exiled penury
Among strange peoples tread the strangers' path."

And while in shadows with slow pace he went
The ruddy daylight faded in the west,
And she that held the rose against her breast
Sang to the stirring of some instrument:

"The sea
That rounds in gloom
The pallid pearl,
Where corals curl
The rosy edges of their barren bloom,
And cold seamaidens wear
Inwoven in their hair
A light that draws the sailor down the wet ways of
despair,

In whose green silken glisten
They drift and wait and listen,
And the sea-monsters lift their heads and stare!
The sorrowing sea,
Like life in me,
Wavers in homeless dreams till love is known
And love for life atone."

Meanwhile the Afghan, glancing here and there,
Saw no one by him, and arose in haste,
And took the drinking cups with jewels graced,
And hid them in his rags, from stair to stair
Slid like a shadow, and from hall to hall;
So vanished, like a shadow from the wall.

Ben Ali from his aloe-planted lawn
Returned, and saw the drinking cups were gone,
And smiled and leaned him in the window dim
To watch the dancing girls, who, seeing him,
Began again to weave, to part, to close,
With tinkling bells and shimmer of white feet,
And she that drooped her head above a rose
Sang in the twilight, languid, slow, and sweet:

“Close-curtained rose,
Open thy petals and the dew disclose.
Hide not so long
Those crimson shades among,

In silken splendour
That nestling tender,
That dewdrop cradled in the heart of thee,
God meant for me.

“A little while,
And naught to me the blossom of thy smile.
Forgive all men;
Yea, love, forgive the false and trust again,
For life deceiveth,
And love believeth;
Within love’s merciful chambers let us stay,
The while we may.”

The singing ceased. There rose a storm of calls
And sudden clangour in his outer halls;
And these were hushed, and some one cried: “The
king!”

Followed the tread of armed men entering.
Ben Ali rose, thinking, “My time was brief;”
And lo, not only the tall king stood there,
His bracelets glittering in the torches’ glare,
And gloomy eyes beneath his sweeping hair,
But at his feet cringed the swart Afghan thief.

THE KING.

“Thus saith the law: ‘The thief shall have his hands
Struck from his wrists, in payment of the wage
Belonging to his sin.’ The king commands



That thou, Ben Ali, wisdom's flower in youth,
Mirror of righteousness and well of truth,
Critic of kings, rebuker of old age,
Shalt judge this Afghan dog as the law stands."

Ben Ali stood with folded arms, and face
Bent down in meditation for a space.

BEN ALI.

"It is good law, O King. But is it not
Good law that, 'He who stealeth to devote
To some religious purpose and intent
Is held exempted from that punishment'?"

THE KING.

"It is good law. But the law holds 'Unproved
The finer motive which the thief hath moved
Unless the pious dedication be
Sequent immediate to the thievery.'"

BEN ALI.

"It is good law, O King, and good to heed.
Now, of 'religious purposes' it calls
First, 'to relieve the needy of their need.'
Can it be doubted that this Afghan falls
Among the 'needy,' and became a thief
To his own need's immediate relief?"

Nay, in the very act of thieving vowed
That 'pious dedication'? Which allowed,
Follows the law's exemption."

The king smiled,
And said: "Set free this good man. To thy wild
Bleak mountains, Afghan. Is the world so small
That thou must steal—if thou must steal at all—
From such a friend as this?" The Afghan fled,
The king across Ben Ali's shoulders passed
His heavy arm and to the gardens led,
Where fluttered groups of dancing girls, aghast,
Huddled aside, and through the night at last
Came to the river, and Ben Ali said:

BEN ALI.

"Hearken, O King, thy counsellor's report:
Thou keepest a young vizier in thy court
Unfit to be a counsellor to power,
Fit only to jest with an idle hour,
Who holds the scales of justice not in awe,
And lightly quibbles with the holy law,
And takes the lives of trembling men to be
The butt and plaything of his casuistry."

THE KING.

"Hearken, O Counsellor, thy king's desire:
Ere next thou blow ablaze the sullen fire

That smoulders in him, see that thou provide
Withal a secret place in which to hide,
Lest the king's darkened days on darkness fall
And miss for aye a bright face at his side;
For, be it truth thou sayest—yea, and truth
Is the sharp sword and javelin of youth—
That every merciful and smiling lie
Shall come to smile and curse us ere we die,
That the king standeth as a massive wall
Which leans to ruin, if it lean at all
Out of the upright line of equity;
Yet, ah, my bitter counsellor," said the king,
"When thou wouldst speak some truth that bears a sting,
I pray thee, speak as bearing love to me,
Who am of such as, lonely for their kind,
In dusty deserts of the spirit find
A naked penitence which no man sees.
My cup of life is drunken to the lees,
And thine hath still its bead along the brim;
And therefore, as in halls empty and dim,
Wakens thy step the echoes in my heart,
And all thy heady ways and reckless tongue,
That splits the marrow like a Kalmuck's dart,
Seem like my very own when first I flung
A challenge in the teeth of life. God knows,
The stars will not again look down on me
With their old radiant intensity;

Only I seem to see, as by the gleam
Of boatmen's torches mirrored in the stream
That bears them on, a faith that not alone
He builds His temple of enduring stone,
But sends the flowers that in its crannies creep,
And in His very scales of justice throws
The young man's dreams, the tears of them that weep,
The words the maiden murmurs to the rose."

The king was still. A passing boatman's oars
Sent the lit ripples to the shadowed shores.
A near muézzin's long, high-towered call
Went yearning up to star-lit architraves,
And dying left a silence over all,
Saving the grassy whisper of small waves.

THE BEGGAR

There was a man whom a king loved, and heard
With smiles his swift step and impetuous word
Among the slow-paced counsellors. To the young
Belong the careless hand, the daring tongue.
Pleasure and pride are the tall flowers that spring
Within the fertile shadow of the king.

There sat a beggar in the market-place,
Of sullen manner and a surly face,
Who caught him by the cloak; that with a stone
He smote the beggar's head, and so passed on,
Cassim Ben Ali, up the palace hill,
Leaving the beggar, fallen, grim, and still.

Sudden as the king's favour is his wrath.
Who for the morrow knows what joy he hath?
Nor can he pile it in his vaults to stay
The crowding misery of another day.
So fell Ben Ali for an arrowy word
And barbed jest that the king's anger stirred,

And he was led beyond the noisy brawls
Of traders chaffering at the market stalls,
And in a pit thrown near the city walls.
Whither the beggar came, and came alone,
A cobble in his hand, beside the pit.
“The wise man waiteth till the time is fit,
The foolish hasteneth to grief,” he said,
Casting the cobble on Ben Ali’s head:
“I am that beggar, and behold that stone.”

Ben Ali on the morrow was restored
To the benignant presence of his lord,
And sending for the beggar, softly said:
“This is that stone.” The beggar bowed his head:
“And this my head, which is among the lowly,
As thine is high, and God is just and holy,”
And threw himself lamenting on the floor.

Ben Ali pondered then a moment more.
“Thou sayest truly, God is just; and lo!
Both of our heads have ached beneath a blow.
I in my time grow wiser, and divine
The beating of thy head will not heal mine;
And have considered and have found it wise,
To exchange with thee some other merchandise.
Take this gold dinar, and remember then
That God is just, if so I come again
Into a pit and ask return of thee.”

Once more Ben Ali was brought low, to see
The king's clenched hand, fixed look, and rigid frown,
Thrust from the palace gate to wander down,
Stripped of his silks, in poverty and shame,
Into the market where the traders came
With files of sag-necked camels o'er the sands,
Bringing the corded wares of hidden lands.
And walking there with eyes now wet and dim,
He sought the beggar, found, and said to him:
"Remember thine exchange of merchandise,
Who sayest, God is just and 'thou art wise."

"Who sayeth 'God is just,' speaks not of me;
Who calleth thee a fool, means none but thee,"
Answered the beggar. "For I understood
To pay the evil back and keep the good
Is increase of the good in merchandise;
Therefore I keep the dinar, and am wise."

Which thing was brought to the king's ear, and he
Summoned the two to stand before his knee,
And took the dinar from the beggar's hand,
And giving to Ben Ali, gave command
To those who waited for his word: "Bring stones
That he may beat with them this beggar's bones,
Who mocks at justice, saying 'God is just,'
And boasting wisdom, fouls her in the dust."

Ben Ali through his meditation heard
The counsellors approving the king's word,
And spoke above their even murmuring:
"Let justice be with God and with the king,
Who are not subject to a moment's chance,
Made and unmade by shifting circumstance.
This is the wisdom of the poor and weak:
The smitten cheek shall warn its brother cheek,
And each man to his nook of comfort run,
His little portion of the morning sun,
His little corner of the noonday shade,
His wrongs forgotten as his debts unpaid.
Let not the evil and the good we do
Be ghosts to haunt us, phantoms to pursue.
I have the dinar and would fain be clear
Of further trading with this beggar here;
For he nor I have caused the world to be,
Nor govern kingdoms with our equity."

"Art thou so poor then, and the beggar wise,
God's justice hidden, and the king's astray?"
Answered the king, slow-voiced, with brooding eyes.
"Art thou so weak, and strong to drive away
Far from to-day the ghost of yesterday?
Free is thy lifted head, while on mine own
The gathered past lies heavier than the crown?
So be it as thou sayest, with him and thee,
Thou who forgivest evil bitterly."

So spoke the king. Ben Ali's steps once more
Were swift and silken on the palace floor.
The beggar went with grim, unchanging face
Back to his begging in the market-place.

THE PILGRIM

I heard a pilgrim near a temple gate
Praying, "I have no fear, for Thou art Fate.

"Morn, eve, noon, if I look up to Thee,
Wilt Thou at night look down, remembering me?

"Nay, then, my sins so great, my service small,"—
So prayed he at the gate,—"forget them all.

"Of claims and rights a load the while I keep,
How in Thy nights, O God, to smile and sleep?

"Pardon, neglect, or slay, as is most meet;
My beaten face I lay beneath Thy feet."

"Pilgrim," I said, "hath He, who toils the while,
Bade thee, of burdens free, to sleep and smile?

"Who built the hills on high, and laid the sea,
Set in thy heart the cry, 'Remember me!'"

ALLAH'S TENT

With fore cloth smoothed by careful hands
The night's serene pavilion stands,
And many cressets hang on high
Against its arching canopy.

Peace to His children God hath sent,
We are at peace within His tent.
Who knows without these guarded doors
What wind across the desert roars?

THE POET AND THE FOUNTAIN

Firdausi by the palace fountain stood
Hard by the Court of Song in quiet mood.

The Sultan smiled to see him. "Thy beard shows
Thee nearer to the cypress than the rose,

"Firdausi. Is thy heart warm and blood cold,
Who singest of love and beauty, being old?"

Firdausi to the fountain turned his eyes,
Grey-mossed and lichened by the centuries.

"What maketh this sweet music, sayest thou?
The water or the stones?" The Sultan's brow

Was overclouded. "Were the water fled,
There were no music certainly," he said.

"The water singing through the garden runs.
Nay, but there is no music in dead stones."

Firdausi bowed: "Allah His grace unfold
Upon the Sultan! Is the water old?"

THE CHENEAUX ISLANDS

There is a wistful, lingering regret
Ever for those whose feet are set
On other paths than where their childhood moved,
And, having loved
The old colonial hills, no level plain,
No tangled forest, the same hope contain,
And by the northern lakes I stand unsatisfied,
Watching the tremulous shadows start and slide,
Hearing the listless waves among the stones,
And the low tones
Of a breeze that through the hemlocks creeps.
Veiled in grey ashes sleeps
The campfire, and thin streams
Of smoke float off like beckoning dreams
Of peaceful men. Around me broods
The sense of aged solitudes,
Of lonely places where
Cold winds have torn blue midnight air
And dipped beneath the edges of the leaves
To moons unchronicled.

We bring
The talk of cities and of schools,
Yet to these quiet pools,
Calm with a thousand silent morns and eves,
It seems no alien thing;
The shadows of the woods
Are brothers to our moods.
Nor less in the quick rush of vivid streets,
And libraries with long rows of mouldering thought,
Is nature, than in green retreats;
Whither from year to year
I come with eager eye and ear,
Hoping, some leafy hour, to feel,
In ways of civic feet unsought,
A secret from the brown earth steal
Into my spirit, and reveal
Some wisdom of a larger worth,
Some quiet truth of growth and birth;
If we, the kindred on the earth,
Are kindred with her, to one issue moving on
Of melancholy night or shimmering dawn,
Surely befits we wanderers wild
To her confederate breast be reconciled;
Out of her primal sleep we came,
And she still dreams; of us that hold
Such strenuous course and venture bold,
Whom such unknown ambition stirs,

Asks of our bright, unsteady flame:
What issue ours that is not hers?

How came he once to these green isles
And channels winding miles and miles,
Cross clasped in hand and pale face set,
The Jesuit, Père Marquette?
To sombre nations, with the blight
Of dead leaves in the blood,
The eager priest into their solitude
And melancholy mood
Flashed like a lamp at night
In sluggish sleepers' eyes;
Out of the east where mornings rise
Came like the morning into ashen skies
With the east's subtle fire and surprise,
And stern beyond his knowledge brought
A message other than he thought:
"Lo! an edict here from the throne of fate,
Whose banners are lifted and armies wait;
The fight moves on at the front, it says,
And the word hath come after many days:
Ye shall walk no more in your ancient ways."

Father, the word has come and gone,
The torpid races
Slumbered, and vanished from their places;

And in our ears intoning ring
The words of that most weary king
In Israel, King Solomon.
Over the earth's untroubled face
The restless generations pace,
Finding their graves regretfully;
Is there no crown, nor any worth,
For men who build upon the earth
What time treads down forgetfully?
Unchanged the graven statute lies,
The code star-lettered in the skies.
It is written there, it is written here;
The law that knows not far or near
 Is sacrifice;
And bird and flower, and beast and tree,
Kingdom and planet wheeling free
Are sacrificed incessantly.
From dark, through dusk, toward light, we tread
On the thorn-crowned foreheads of the dead.
The law says not there is nothing lost;
It only says that the end is gain;
The gain may be at the helpless cost
Of hands that give in vain;
And in this world, where many give,
None gives the widow's mite save he
That, having but one life to live,
Gives that one life so utterly.

Thou that unknowing didst obey,
With straitened thought and clouded eye,
The law, we learn at this late day,
O Père Marquette, whose war is done,
Ours is the charge to bear it on,
To hold the veering banner high

 Until we die,
To meet the issue in whose awe
Our kindred earth we stand above,
If knowing sacrifice is law,
We sacrifice ourselves for love.

Or are we then such stuff as fills a dream?
Some wide-browed spirit dreams us, where he stands
Watching the long twilight's stream
Below his solemn hands,
Whose reverie and shaping thought began
Before the stars in their large order ran?
Fluid we are, our days flow on,
And round them flow the rivers of the sun,
As long ago in places where
The Halicarnassian wandered with his curious eyes
On Egypt's mysteries,
And Babylonian gardens of the air
Hung green above the city wall.
If this were all, if this were all—

If it were all of life to give
Our hearts to God and slip away,
And if the end for which we live
Were simple as the close of day,
Were simple as the fathers say,
Were simple as their peace was deep
Who in the old faith fell asleep!

No night bird now makes murmur; in the trees
No drowsy chuckle of dark-nested ease.
The campfire's last grey embers fall.
With dipping prow and shallop sides
The slender moon to her mooring rides
Over the ridge of Isle La Salle,
Under the lee of the world,
Her filmy halliards coiled and thin sails furled,
And silver clouds about her phantom rudder curled.

THE SHEPHERD AND THE KNIGHT

SHEPHERD.

Sir Knight with stalwart spear and shield,
Where ridest thou to-day?
The sunlight lies across the field;
Thou art weary in the way;
Dismount and stay.

KNIGHT.

Peace to thine house and folds and stalls,
I ride upon my quest.
I travel until evening falls
Whither my Lord deems best,
By me unguessed.

SHEPHERD.

Who is your lord that sends you forth,
Good knight, from your own land?
He needs must be of royal worth,
To whom such warriors stand
At his command.

KNIGHT.

We have not seen His face, we hear
A voice that bids us be
The servants of an unborn year,
Knights of a day that we
Shall never see.

SHEPHERD.

Good reason that ye go astray!
Warrior, I fain would learn—
So many young knights wend this way—
What wages they may earn,
For none return.

KNIGHT.

They go before me in the night,
They follow after me,
They earn the triumph of the right,
Their wages are to be
Faithful as He.

SHEPHERD.

Look you, Sir Knight, I take mine ease,
Fat are my sheep and kine,
I have mine own philosophies,
My way of life——

KNIGHT.

Is thine,
And mine is mine.

SHEPHERD.

Why, now! The man is gone! Pardie!
A silly wage! I trow
His lord that pays him mad as he,
Fools are a crop will grow
Though no man sow.

THE HERB OF GRACE

To all who fain would pass their days
Among old books and quiet ways,
And walk with cool, autumnal pace
The bypaths of tranquillity,
To each his own select desire,
To each his old familiar briar
And silent friend and chattering fire,
Companions in civility.

Outside the world goes rolling by,
And on the trampling and the cry
There comes the long, low mournful sigh
Of night winds roaming vagrantly;
They see too many sullen sights
This side the stars on winter nights;
A kind of hopeless Jacobites.
—This brand, indeed, smokes fragrantly.

The perfect mixture's far to seek;
Your pure Virginia, pale and meek,
Requires the passion of Perique,
The Latakian lyrics;

Perfection is the crown that flies
The reaching hands and longing eyes,
And art demands what life denies
To nicotine empirics.

Sirs, you remember Omar's choice,
Wine, verses, and his lady's voice
Making the wilderness rejoice?
It needs one more ingredient.
A boon, the Persian knew not of,
Had made to mellower music move
The lips to wine, if not to love,
A trifle too obedient.

This weed I call the "herb of grace."
My reasons are, as some one says,
"Between me and my fireplace."
Ophelia spoke of rue, you know.
"There's rue for you and there's for me,
But you must wear it differently."
Quite true, of course.—Your pipe I see
Draws hard. They sometimes do, you know.—

Alas, if we in fancy's train
To drowse beside our fires are fain,
Letting the world slip by amain,
Uneager of its verities,

Our neighbours will not let us be
At peace with inutility.
They quote us maxims, two or three,
Or similar asperities.

I question not a man may bear
His still soul walled from noisy care,
And walk serene in places where
An ancient wrath is denizen;
The pilgrim's feet may know no ease,
And yet his heart's delight increase,
For all ways that are trod in peace
Lead upward to God's benison.

No less I doubt our age's need
Is some of Izaak Walton's creed.—
Your pardon, gentlemen! I breed
Impatience with a homily.—
Our flag there were a sombre type,
If every star implied a stripe.
I wish you all a wholesome pipe,
And ingle blinking bonnily.

Poor ethics these of mine, I fear,
And yet, when our green leaves and sere
Have dropped away, perhaps we'll hear
These questions answered curiously.

The battered book here on my knees?
Is Herrick, his "Hesperides."
Gold apples from the guarded trees
Are stored here not penuriously.

The poet of the gurgling phrase
And quaint conceits of elder days,
Loved holiness and primrose ways
About in equal quantities,
Wassail and yuletide, feast and fair,
Blown petticoats, a child's low prayer;
A fine, old pagan joy is there;
Some wild-rose muse's haunt it is.

Mine herb of grace, that kindred art
To all who choose "the better part,"
Grant us the old world's childlike heart,
Now grown an antique rarity!
With mayflowers on our swords and shields
We'll learn to babble of green fields
Like Falstaff, whom good humour yields
A place still in its charity.

Visions will come at times; I note
One with a cool, white, delicate throat;
Glory of names that shine remote,
From towers of high endeavouring.

Care not for these, nor care to roam,
Ulysses, o'er the beckoning foam.
"Here rest and call content our home"
Beside our fire's soft wavering.

VERSES FROM "THE CANTICLE OF THE ROAD"

I

On the open road, with the wind at heel
Who is keen of scent and yelping loud,
Stout heart and bounding blood we feel,
Who follow fancy till day has bowed
Her forehead pure to her evening prayer
And drawn the veil on her wind-blown hair.
Free with the hawk and the wind we stride
The open road, and the world is wide
From rim to rim, and the skies hung high,
And room between for a hawk to fly
With tingling wing and lust of the eye.

II

Broad morning, blue morning, oh, jubilant wind!
Lord, Thou hast made our souls to be
Fluent and yearning long, as the sea
Yearns after the moon, and follows her,
With boon of waves and sibilant purr,

Round this world and past and o'er
All waste sea-bottoms and curving shore,
Only once more and again to find
The same sea-bottoms and beaten beach,
The same sweet moon beyond his reach
And drawing him onward as before.

III

Hark, from his covert what a note
The wood thrush whirls from his kingly throat!
And the bobolink strikes that silver wire
He stole from the archangelic choir,
From a psaltery played in the glory alone
By an amber angel beneath the throne.
He strikes it twice, and deep, deep, deep,
Where the soul of music lies sleep.—
The rest of his song he learned, Ah me!
From a gay little devil, loose and free,
Making trouble and love in Arcadie.

IV

My brother of the dusty feet
Dragged eastward as my own go west,
Here from the birth of time addressed,
And the manner of your coming set
To this event, that we might meet,
And glance, and pass, and then forget;



We meet no more beneath the sun,
Yet for an instant we were one.
And now once more, as you and I,
In dungeons of ourselves we lie,
And through the grated windows peer;
As though a falling star should shine
A moment in your eyes and mine,
Then darkness there, and silence here.

V

Oh, Fons Bandusiæ, babbling spring,
From what deep wells come whispering!
What message bringest thou, what spells
From buried mountain oracles,
Thou limpid, lucid mystery?
Nay, this one thing I read in thee,
That saint or sinner, wise or fool,
Who dips hot lips within thy pool,
Or last or first, or best or worst,
Thou askest only that he thirst,
And givest water pure and cool.

VI

A draught of water from the spring,
An apple from the wayside tree,
A bit of bread for strengthening,
A pipe for grace and policy;

And so, by taking time, to find
A world that's mainly to one's mind ;
Some health, some wit in friends a few,
Some high behaviours in their kind,
Some dispositions to be true.

TO FAUSTINE

FAUSTINE

She muses while the sunbeams creep
In slanting piers of light,
She muses while the shadows sleep
About the fire at night;

Hers is the vestal's waiting air,
The silence sweet and weird;
More wisdom nestles in her hair
Than crouched in Nestor's beard;

Troops of to-morrows cross her thought
In happy Junes and Mays,
And files of slow Septembers fraught
With priceless yesterdays;

And all her hours a thronging host
With visitations fill;
She gazes on each tranquil ghost
With eyes more tranquil still.

SOMETIME IT MAY BE

Sometime it may be you and I
In that deserted yard shall lie,
Where memories fade away,
Caring no more for our old dreams,
Busy with new and alien themes,
As saints and sages say.

But let our graves be side by side,
That passers-by at even-tide
May pause a moment's space:
"Ah, they were lovers who lie here!
Else why these low graves laid so near
In this forgotten place?"

WHEN ALL THE BROOKS HAVE RUN AWAY

When all the brooks have run away,
When the sea has left its place,
When the dead earth to night and day
Turns round a stony face,

Let other planets hold the strife
And burden now it bears,
The toil of ages, lifting life
Up those unnumbered stairs,

Out of that death no eye has seen
To something far and high;
But underneath the stairs, Faustine,
How melancholy lie

The broken shards and left behind,
The frustrate and unfit,
Who sought the infinite and kind,
And found the infinite.

ONE. HOUR

The sun shall go darkly his way, the skies
Be lampless of stars, and the moon with sighs
Of her years complain,
And you and I in the waste shall meet
Of a downward gulf with hurrying feet,
And remember then
Only this shy, encircled place,
Only this hour's dimpled grace—
And smile again.

HEIRS OF TIME

Who grieves because the world is old,
Or cares how long it last,
If no grey threads are in our gold,
The shade our marbles cast,

We may not see it creeping near ;
Time's heirs are you and I,
And freely spend each minted year
For anything 'twill buy.

WHO MAY WITH THE SHREWD HOURS STRIVE?

Who may with the shrewd Hours strive?
Too thrifty dealers they,
That with the one hand blandly give,
With the other take away,

With here and there some falling flake,
Some dust of gold, between
The hands that give and hands that take
Slipped noiseless and unseen.

Ah, comedy of bargainings,
Whose gain of years is found
A little silt of golden things
Forgotten on the ground!

LET ME NO MORE A MENDICANT

Let me no more a mendicant
Without the gate
Of the world's kingly palace wait;
Morning is spent,
The sentinels change and challenge in the tower,
Now slant the shadows eastward hour by hour.

Open the door, O Seneschal! Within
I see them sit,
The feasters, daring destiny with wit,
Casting to win
Or lose their utmost, and men hurry by
At offices of confluent energy.

Let me not here a mendicant
Without the gate
Linger from dayspring till the night is late,
And there are sent
All homeless stars to loiter in the sky,
And beggared midnight winds to wander by.

CURARE SEPULTOS

Id cinerem aut Manis credis curare sepultos?

“Do you think their spirits care
For their ashes and their tombs?”
Do you think they are aware,
That the tended roses are all gone with their perfumes,
That the footsteps of the mourners no longer linger
there,

Where the field flower only blooms?

They are dead. Let none remember;
Let their memories die as they;
Clear the dead leaves of November
For the careless passing footsteps of April and of May;
Be no sign of last night's saddened ember
In the flame we raise to-day.

Not that our hearts are cold,
O dead friends, who were dear to us!
Do we our lips withhold
From fallen stones and low graves piteous,
But only that death's voice is faint and old,
And life's imperious.

TO-MORROW

*Nunc vino pellite curas,
Cras ingens iterabimus aequor.*

Now drive away your cares with wine,
To-morrow on the sea we go.
To-night for us the tapers shine,
To-night the roses blow;
To-morrow shall our steps incline
Where the wild waters flow.

To-morrow! Let to-morrow be
Where all this world's to-morrows are;
Where each must follow faithfully
The guiding of his star.
The moment that is given me
Is mine to make or mar.

Drink to me only with your eyes,
And I with mine will pay the debt;
Drink to my moment ere it dies
Divine and fragrant yet:
To each to-night its melodies!
To-morrow to forget!

SNOW

After the singing birds are gone
And the leaves are parched and low,
When the year is old, and the sky is wan,
Then comes the snow.

Hushed are the world's discordant notes
By the soft hand of snow.
Each flake how silently it floats;
How peaceable, how slow!

Ah, when the silver cord is loosed
And the golden bowl is broken,
And the spirit poured on the air unused,
As one has spoken,

After the last faint sob of breath
And the jar of life's outflow,
Over the sunken soul comes death,
Soft, cool, like snow.

BY THE SEA

Ave Maria by the sea,
Whose waves go on forevermore!
And we, the sheltered of the shore,
Have prayed to thee
For those in ships that journey far,
Where all day long their sails are white,
And grey and ghostly in the night
Each ship beneath its star.

Ave Maria! Be our guide.
A watchful star, a port to reach,
Ave Maria! give to each
Some eventide.
Be thou our moon of mystic light,
Across the ocean's gloom and wrath
Showing the lines of a silver path
To watchers in the night.

Ave Maria! From the sea
The constant litanies arise;
The burden of its many sighs
Goes up to thee.

Our lives make murmur and are vain
As ripples bringing tiny shells,
That the great sea behind impels,
And all its waves complain.

IN PORT TO-DAY

Now are harboured ships asleep
Beside their shadows,
Home from the wind-winnowed deep
And unscythed meadows
Of the bright green gliding sea,
From the windward gliding to the lee;

And one ship in port to-day
On the morrow
Southward bound will far away
The swift sea furrow;
Whom the loud Antarctic waits
And frozen citadels with creaking gates.

THE RETURN

I have a home, though palmer bound
For holy lands, I pine for it;
I know its sheltering walls around
The hearth and lamp that shine for it,
The door apart;

I shall return on windward seas
By blue shores of Illyria
To find it filled with melodies
From Eden, beyond Syria.
It is your heart.

AS WE GROW OLD

Tempora labuntur tacitisque senescimus annis.

"Time glides along and we grow old
By process of the silent years,"
More fain the busy hands to fold,
More quiet when a tale is told
Where death appears.

It is not that the feet would shrink
From that dark river, lapping, cold,
And hid with mists from brink to brink;
Only one likes to sit and think,
As one grows old.

WAYFARERS

All honest things in the world we met
With welcome, fair and free ;
A little love is with us yet,
A friend, or two, or three ;

Of the sun and moon and stars were glad,
Of the waters of river and sea ;
We thank Thee, Lord, for the years we've had,
For the years that yet shall be.

These are our brothers, the winds of the airs,
These are our sisters, the flowers ;
Be near us at evening and hear our prayers,
O God, in the late, grey hours.

THE HOUSE

Such an house I'll build and own,
When into old contentment grown
With reaping what my youth has sown.

The drooping roof be low and wide,
Curved like a seashell's inner side;
Let vines the patient pillars hide

Of that deep porch and ample shade;
There let no hurrying step invade,
Troubled or anxious or afraid.

I pray that birches very white
May stand athwart the woods at night,
Sweet and slim by late moonlight;

And I desire a beech may be
Not far away from mine and me,
Strong, pure, serene, and matronly;

An oak outspread in ample space,
Strength out of storms met face to face,
In his male girth and wide embrace.

Lest all the years go by in vain
Let the wind only and the rain
Paint my four walls with weather stain,

Nor phantom youth be ever there;
Of time's significance aware,
Time's grey insignia let them bear.

A brook before shall glide along,
And where its narrow waters throng
Make bubble music and low song.

A garden on the rearward side
Shall hold some flowers of civil pride,
And some in meekness dignified.

Within my house all men may see
How goodly four-square beams may be,
How unashamed in honesty.

There shall my day to evening creep,
Though downward, yet, as rivers sweep
By winding ways to the great deep.

SONNETS

THE HILLS

Consider the large heavenward hills, their ease,
Their genial age, their wisdom. More and more
I lift mine eyes unto the hills which bore
Of old their brunt of battle, and have peace.
These are the scars were ground across their knees
When the earth shuddered and the ice came on.
The hills have heaved and shouted and made moan
For the hot fire that bit their arteries.

Gentle and strong, old veterans of war,
Now humble with each flower and woven nest,
Friends of the sun and moon and morning star,
And fain of the mad north wind's biting jest;
My counsellors at unwritten law they are,
Teachers of lore and laughter, labour and rest.

WORDSWORTH

Not for a kindred reason thee we praise
With those, who in their minstrelsy are lords
Of elfin pipe and witchery of words,
Masters of life, who thread its tangled maze,
And on strange corners turn their curious gaze;
Nor those that delve for jewels in the hoards
Of old philosophies, of love's soft ways
Sing variously, or chaunt of clashing swords.
Rather for sympathy with the silent laws,
Which are themselves but sympathies; that the worn
Fine here a "still Saint Mary's Lake"; because
"The world is too much with us," and through thee
"Old Triton" sometimes blows on "wreathèd horn"
A fitful note, clear from infinity.

THE WATER-LILY

Our boat drifts idly on the listless river
And water-lilies brush its bulging side,
In feeble wavings while the waters quiver
Like the pale sleeper's pulse before he died.
Reach me that water-lily floating near;
Its sullen roots give way with dull regret,
And now it lies across your fingers, dear,
Long, glistening in the sunlight, green and wet.

See the gold heart emerging from the dew,
Folded in petals of the purest white!
Look! through this stem in silent hours it drew
Its fragrance from deep waters out of sight,
And found among the river oozes cold,
This perfume and this whiteness and this gold.

THE THRUSH

I heard a wood thrush singing late and long
In the warm silence of the afternoon,
And drew more near to hear his secret croon
And intimate close confidence of song,
But at the noisy tread of my rude feet
The music ceased, the phantom voice was gone,
And far away I heard him, in the sweet,
Serene recesses singing, and alone.

The law is written on the evening skies,
The wood thrush sings its beauty and despair;
Thou shalt not trespass where the loveliest lies,
Nor use the holiest place for common prayer,
And surely as God liveth, to the eyes
Of him who lifts the veil, He is not there.

THE ROMAN WAY

I

Being so weary then we turned aside
From the straight road and Roman Way that goes
Too straightly upward, on what breathless snows
Its measured lines' austerity descried.
"Captain, too stern this granite road!" we cried,
And "For whose right in militant array
Are led the sons of men this Roman Way?"
But the slow avalanche alone replied.

Therefore we turned aside, and day by day
Men passed us with set faces to the road,
And crying, "The Eternal City!" went their way,
While in the pleasant valley we abode
With all its dewy herbage and the fleet
Running of rivulets with silken feet.

II

And we had large experience with the stars
And sweet acquaintance with the clovered sods,
The seasons were our epics, filled with wars,
And heroes' councils and untroubled gods.

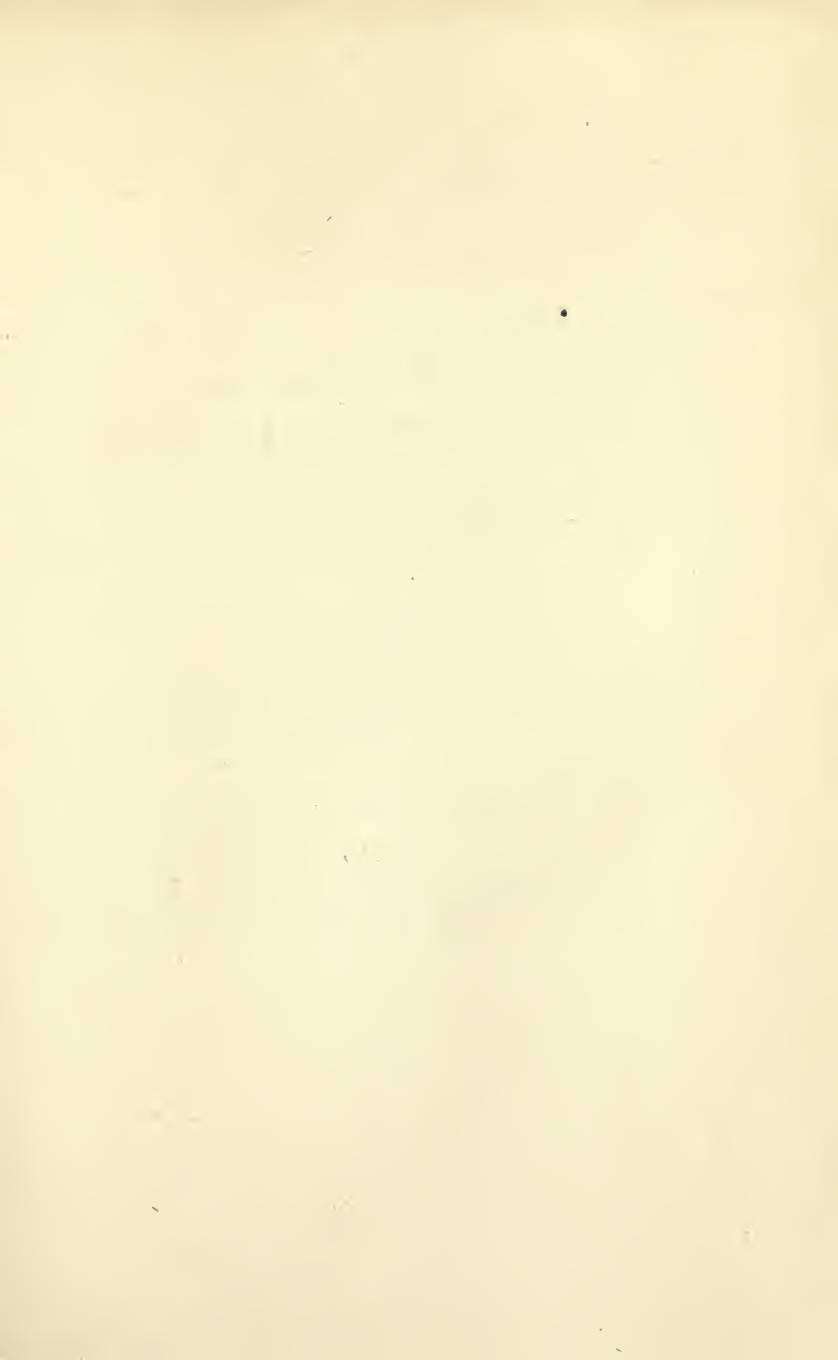
The groves elegiac, rivers pastoral,
Meadows athrill with sudden tragedies,
With loves of larks aloft and lyrical,
And busy comedy of the citizen bees.

Still of their genial fellowship who wait
The spring's incoming as a marriage morn
Whom fall and winter winds will make elate
As bugles a young hunter, we were borne
Along the casual current of each day
Apart from those who trod the Roman Way.

III

And in the main of living we were glad
That we had left the highway and had grown
To wear our tolerance as a silken gown
And smile at those who went in armour clad;
And old age came upon us, grey and sad,
Stealthy and slow, and passed and passed again
The onward faces of swift journeying men,
Keen with the life of some large Iliad.

Now—for our heads are stricken, our lives are
As flowers sodden in the winter rain—
We, who alive are dead—and whether far
Beyond the snows are blissful births of pain,
Or Rome, or Cæsar, we know not—we say,
“There is one way of life, the Roman Way.”



FOLLY

Blithe little maid with lifted lips,
Red as a bunch of holly,
What! May I hold your finger tips,
Dear little sweetheart, Folly?

List to a whisper in your ear,
Pink little ear, dear Folly,
While you were gone some one was here,
The Lady Melancholy.

Yes, and she sat in your old place,
This Lady Melancholy.
Ah, well! but she had a lovely face,
Sweet as your face, sweet Folly.

CONCERNING TABITHA'S DANC- ING OF THE MINUET

Tabitha, sweet Tabitha, I never^e can forget,
Nor how the music sounded, nor how our glances met,
When underneath the swinging lamps we danced the
minuet.

The stately bow, the dainty poise, and in the music
slips.
Did she linger for a moment, while I held her finger
tips,
And wondered if she'd ever let me touch them to my
lips?

And Tabitha wore powdered hair and dressed in quaint
brocade,
A tiny patch on either cheek just where the dimple
played ;
The little shoe I noticed too, and clocks, I am afraid.

The music ceased. I led her softly smiling to the door.
A pause, a rustling courtesy down almost to the floor,
And Tabitha, sweet Tabitha, mine eyes beheld no more.

I've trod in many measures since with widow, wife, and
 maid,
In every kind of satin, silk, and spangled lace arrayed,
And through it all have heard the fall of Tabitha's
 brocade.

AN IDYL OF THE WOOD

Janet and I went jesting
To the wood, to the wood,
In a visionary, questing,
Idle mood.
“Ah! my heart,” I said, “it teaches
I shall find among the beeches
A white nymph in the green reaches
Of the wood.”—

“Oh, you will! Then I’ll discover,
In the wood, in the wood,
A fairy prince and lover,
Or as good.
He shall kneel and——”

“Now I spy light!
She shall meet me in the shy light
Of the twittering leaves and twilight
Of the wood,

“And I’ll say, ‘Here love convinces
Of his powers, of his powers.’ ”—

“And he’ll say, ‘Thou shalt be Princess
Of the Flowers.’ ”—

“And I’ll whisper, ‘Though thou shinest
As a goddess, love’s divinest,
Loveless, lovely, lo! thou pinest
In thy bowers.’ ”—

And she laughed, with, “Farewell, poet,”—

And I said, “Farewell, maid.

Seek love alone, alone, and know it
Unafraid.”—

Was it hours I went unwitting,
Fancy into fancy fitting,
Pallid flowers, and dim birds flitting,
As I strayed?

Till at length, where in profusion

Low and wet, wild and wet,

Fern and branch in shy confusion

Wooded and met,

There I saw her, lifting, peeping—

“Dryad?”—“Prince?”—come whispering, creeping.

Then her eyes were lit and leaping.

’Twas Janet!

Lit and leaping with suggestions.
"Why, it's you!"—"Why, it's you!"
"Yes, but, Jenny, now the question's,
Is it true?
Am I princely to your seeming?
You the dryad of my dreaming,
Born of beech leaves and the gleaming
Of the dew?"

And we put it to the testing
Of a kiss, of a kiss,
And the jesting and the questing
Came to this.
"Tested, tried, and proven neatly,
I should call it true completely."
And Janet said softly, sweetly,
"So it is."

Oh, the glamour and the glimmer
Of the wood, of the wood,
Where the shadow and the shimmer
Smile and brood,
Where the lips of love laugh folly,
And the eyes of love are holy,
In the radiant melancholy
Of the wood!

PHYLLIS AND CORYDON

Phyllis took a red rose from the tangles of her hair,—
Time, the Golden Age; the place, Arcadia, anywhere,—

Phyllis laughed, the saucy jade: "Sir Shepherd, wilt
have this,
Or"—Bashful god of skipping lambs and oaten reeds!
—"a kiss?"

Bethink thee, gentle Corydon! A rose lasts all night
long,
A kiss but slips from off your lips like a thrush's even-
ing song.

A kiss that goes, where no one knows! A rose, a crim-
son rose!
Corydon made his choice and took—Well, which do
you suppose?

MAYING

Get up, sweet-slug-a-bed! Herrick.

And Phillida with garlands gaye
Was made the lady of the Maye. Nicholas Breton.

Come, Phillida, come! for the hours are fleet,
And sweet are the soft meadow murmurs, and sweet
Are the merry May flowers that long for thy feet.
Come, Phillida, come!

They are waiting to make thee their Lady of May,
And have twined in the midst of the marigolds gay
A little red flower; for pity, they say;
Thou knowest for whom.

And lovers are sighing among the green brake,
And birds in their flying soft madrigals make.
Hark! hear the girls crying, and all for thy sake.
Come, Phillida, come!

TWO LITTLE MAIDS

Two little maids went roaming, roaming,
All in the fields alone.

"Suppose that a boy were coming, coming,
Over the fields," said one, said one,
To the other little maid said one.

Then the second little maid fell dreaming, dreaming.

"He'll bring me a rose," said she.

"He won't! You are always scheming, scheming,

As horrid as you can be!" Dear me!

As horrid as she could be.

Two little maids in a fury, fury,

No little boy in view,

And this is the end of the story. Sorry!

Why didn't they make it two? Eheu!

So simple to make him two!

TWENTY YEARS HENCE

Twenty years hence, some fading day,
Will you through this green orchard stray,
With thoughts afar
On golden hours we freely spent,
And bought the merchandise, content,
At Time's bazaar?

You'll say—"He puffed the smoke in rings;
We talked of books, and other things;
Devised a plot;
Together wove some idle rhymes
Of coloured threads that matched sometimes,
And sometimes not.

"The oriole from his chosen tree
Made better poetry than we,
About his nest.
Soft paced the hours like clouds, until
There rose a poem better still
Far in the west."—

Twenty years hence! Across the sky
The swift incessant swallows fly.
You'll not forget
The bees, nor how the oriole sung,
Twenty years since, when we were young,
His chansonette?

"Margaret, Margaret!" Some one calls!
"Margaret, come. The night dew falls,
The grass is wet."
Twenty years hence—The lawn is dark,
And the whip-poor-wills are wailing. Hark!
"Margaret! Margaret!"

WITHOUT THE GATE

Spectral birches, slim and white,
Stand apart in the cool moonlight,
The faint thin cries
Of the night arise
And the stars are out in companies.

They are but lamps on your palace stair,
My queen of the night with dusky hair,
Whose heart is a rose
In a garden close
And the gate is shut where the highway goes.

Margaret, Margaret, early and late
I knock and whisper without the gate.
No night wind blows,
Still is the rose,
Noiseless the flowing moonlight flows.

I knock and listen. No sound is heard.
The rose in its fragrance sleeps unstirred.
Early and late
I watch and wait
For the love of a rose by a garden gate.

ANCIEN M'SIEU PIERRE

Was it, Nannette, so long ago?
Trois vingt et—Chut! How time does go!
You must be dead! What do I know!
'Twas long ago.

Your eyes—ah, I remember now!
They seemed to say, “But, Pierre, you’re so,
So bad!” And that was long ago,
Long, long ago.

Yes, they were blue. And you stood there,
And then the wind blew out your hair.
How beautiful! how soft! how fair,
Nannette, your hair!

So long it takes one to forget!
I have been glad, and am, and yet,
Sometimes—it’s strange—one’s eyes are wet.
Nannette! Nannette!

What’s that! I dream! Did some one speak?
Her hair was blown across my cheek.
It seemed so. How the shutters creak!
Did some one speak?

CHRISTMAS EVE

The abbot was counting his beads in his cell
With a flagon beside him. The abbot drank well,
And emptied it oft ere the first matin bell.

All quiet, all well.

“Hist! Brother Menander! A word in thine ear.
I’ll show thee a way, if the corridor’s clear,
To the abbot’s own cellar. The abbot may hear?
Never fear! Never fear!”

Oh, Brother Menander, oh, bold Brother John,
Be chary, call wary on Mary her Son!
Ah, Jesu, the moon the cold snow shines on,
How bitter and wan!

So roundly they drank till the first matin bell,
And were caught by the abbot, as chronicles tell.
What would you! ’Twas Christmas Eve. So it befell.
And all quiet and well.

THE CAROL SINGER

Gentles all, or knights or ladies,
Happiness be yours, alway ;
Dance and carolling our trade is,
But we sing for love to-day..

Merry lads and dainty lasses
Trip beneath the mistletoe,
Dance to sound of clinking glasses.
Bells are ringing in the snow.

By the look that on your face is,
Sweet, my song is worth a kiss.
There is weeping in cold places,
We must laugh the more in this.

Gentles all, or knights or ladies,
Happiness is yours, alway ;
Dance and carolling our trade is,
But we sing for love to-day.

ARCADIE. I

On the road to Arcadie,
Past the mountains, past the sea,
Past the crossways soberly
To Arcadie, to Arcadie.

Pilgrims of a dream are we,
Knowing not if true it be,
But we press on silently
To Arcadie, to Arcadie.

Arcadie! Oh, Arcadie!
We are lost, we cannot see!
For the dust blows bitterly
On the road to Arcadie.

ARCADIE. II

I travelled many winding ways
That weary seemed to me,
In cloudy nights and windy days
To find old Arcadie.

The shepherds by the wayside wept
"We fain would go with thee,
An 'twere not for the sheep we kept,
To far off Arcadie."

Along the selfsame way I fare
And the shepherds ask of me,
"Hast thou seen the sweet land anywhere?"
"Yea, but the people dwelling there
Know not 'tis Arcadie."

MARTIAL TO PLINY

*Cum rosa regnat, cum madent capilli,
Nunc me vel rigidi legant Catones.*

Come not with wine drops on the hair
 To Pliny's gates,
To whom all earnest thoughts repair,
And quiet Wisdom entered there
 His bidding waits.

When the rose is queen and the hair is wet
 With wine and oil,
Read Martial's verses, and forget
That life is stern, and time a debt
 To pay with toil.

LAST YEAR'S NEST

There are no birds in last year's nest.
Where snows have been,
There is no place for love to rest
And nestle in.

Mine were the summer songs, but there
Fell the white cold.
No feathery thoughts now nestle where
They did of old.

EPILOGUE TO A BOOK OF UNIMPORTANT VERSES

An unfair title that forestalls
The judgment of my peers,
An after title that recalls
The hopes of other years,
When words were flowers beside the way,
And the world in rhythm ran,
And grief was dainty, and love was play,
And the breath of death would scan,
And all the long results of time
Were captives of a happy rhyme.

FINIS

The wind and the rain
And the sunshine again
And the murmur of flies at the window pane!
I weave my rhymes
In the morning betimes,
And it all creeps in with the faint word chimes.

For the wind is there,
Wet skies and fair,
And the buzz of the flies there too somewhere,
And there is the beat
Of the passers' feet
Gone echoing down the hidden street.



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